

Abstract of the Disclosure

An “access point” data terminal device is positioned at or incorporated into a display or acting as a standalone device accessible to a user transporting a portable computing device. A short-range communication link is provided by an IrDA infrared transceiver, or a Bluetooth radio transceiver, or both, to permit data and programs to be exchanged between the access point and nearby portable computing devices. The access point is provided with a program installation mechanism that is manually operable by the user when the portable computing device is positioned near the access point to download and install application software which programs the portable computing device to utilize the services made available at the access point. A longer-range communications mechanism, preferably implemented as a PCMCIA communications card selected to connect to an available network or communications facility, enables the access terminal to act as a bridge coupling nearby portable computing devices to remote computers. The longer range communications system may further provide an Internet connection to the portable device, permitting the portable device to exchange E-mail, exchange information with a selected Web server, synchronize data file content, and to access and use other available resources. A surface mounted fractal antenna may be used to advantage to facilitate wireless communications.